Federal e-Waste Effort gets Mixed Reviews

(San Francisco, CA – July 20, 2011) An Interagency Task Force – chaired by the White House Council on Environmental Quality, Environmental Protection Agency, and General Services Administration, today released “A National Strategy for Electronics Stewardship.” The report makes a variety of important recommendations to promote green design of electronics, and to improve handling of e-waste coming from federal agencies. According to environmental groups, the report has some good recommendations on green design and on using certified recyclers, but it completely fails to address what is generally recognized as the most serious e-waste problem – e-waste exporting to developing countries.

One of the report’s stated goals is to ensure that the federal agencies will “lead by example” in managing their used electronics.

“We are very disappointed that the Task Force missed the opportunity handed to them by President Obama’s mandate to truly lead by example and ensure that all federal agencies do the right thing and not export obsolete used electronic equipment unless it is fully functional,” said Barbara Kyle, National Coordinator of the Electronic TakeBack Coalition, a national environmental coalition which promotes responsible recycling of e-waste. “We have other companies like Dell, HP, Apple, Samsung that have set the leadership bar there, so I don’t understand why our own federal government can’t do the same with its own e-waste.”

“Sadly, this report is a living contradiction,” said Jim Puckett, Executive Director of the Basel Action Network. “On the one hand it claims to promote responsible recycling and job creation here in the U.S., but then does nothing to prevent e-waste exporting, which squanders our critical metals resources, and poisons children abroad while exporting good recycling jobs from our country. This report shows why we need Congress to pass the Responsible Electronics Recycling Act, now under consideration in both the Senate and Congress, to truly address this issue.”

Currently, most U.S. electronic waste is exported to developing countries by many U.S. companies that claim to be recyclers, to be bashed, burned, flushed with acids, and melted down in unsafe conditions in developing countries. Eighty percent of children in Guiyu, China, a region where many “recycled” electronics wind up, have elevated levels of lead in their blood, due to the toxins in those electronics, much of which originates in the U.S. The plastics in the imported electronics are typically burned outdoors, which can emit deadly dioxin or furans, which are breathed in by workers and nearby residents.

ETBC applauds the commitment by the GSA to use its purchasing power to promote greener products, and to get involved in the standards setting processes.

“We think it’s appropriate that the country’s largest electronics purchaser,

especially one using taxpayer dollars, do everything possible to advocate for products that are less toxic, longer lasting, and more recyclable," said Barbara Kyle.

More information:

Link to Task Force Report - http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/conserve/materials/ecycling/taskforce/docs/strategy.pdf [1]
E –waste Overview - www.electronicstakeback.com [2]
E-waste reports, films and photos – www.ban.org [3]and www.ban.org/photogallery/index.html [4]
E-waste legislation - http://www.electronicstakeback.com/promote-good-laws/federal-legislation/ [5]Export briefing book http://www.electronicstakeback.com/wp-content/uploads/E-Waste_Export_Briefing_Book.pdf [6]

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Links:
[1] http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/conserve/materials/ecycling/taskforce/docs/strategy.pdf
[2] http://www.electronicstakeback.com
[3] http://www.ban.org
[4] http://www.ban.org/photogallery/index.html
[5] http://www.electronicstakeback.com/promote-good-laws/federal-legislation/
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